

Breaking Down the **BARRIERS**

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FROM THE EDITOR

The Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) held its Fall Conference in Calgary last November 26 - 30. In this first issue of 1995, we'll hear about some of the discussions pertaining to accessible transit at that conference. We'll also read about how Alberta's family of transportation services for persons with disabilities is growing.

If you have more news along these lines, or any other issues related to transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities, give us a call at 427-7674.

ACCESSIBLE TRANSIT WORKSHOP - CUTA CONFERENCE

The CUTA conference in Calgary included a workshop on Accessible Transportation, which was attended by members of the province's Advisory Committee on Barrier Free Transportation.

The purpose of the workshop was to evaluate the progress in Canada toward the goal of accessibility in public transit.

It was entitled *Staying the Course to Accessible Transportation: A Reality Check*. The overwhelming consensus was that in spite of tight budgets everywhere, there is continuous forward movement. Most communities are indeed staying the course with plans to increase accessibility.

Albertans involved with specialized transit reported positive steps taken by their communities to improve accessibility.

Bev Allison, a user of accessible transportation in Calgary, said that her city was a good place to live for persons with disabilities. She commented on the excellent services available ranging from handi-buses to accessible taxis and transit to Greyhound.

Dennis Nowicki of Edmonton DATS identified cutbacks as a problem his organization faces. DATS is expecting a 50 per cent increase in riders by the year 2000, but their funding is likely to be frozen.

June MacGregor, of Alberta Transportation and Utilities, emphasized the province's role as a facilitator in helping to achieve the goal of a family of services. She remarked on the need for smaller communities to pool resources. And she commented on the challenge of providing good services in the face of funding cuts to regular transit. This takes on special significance in the light of the rising expectations of people with disabilities. As the '90s progress, there will be greater insistence by consumers on improvements to services, regardless of who holds responsibility for those services.

Members of the Advisory Committee involved in the workshop:
Pat Pelegriano - Calgary Handi-bus Ass. (Moderator); John Hubbell - Calgary Transit; Dennis Nowicki - DATS; Jim Beddingfield, June MacGregor - A T & U (Panelists)

LOW FLOOR BUSES - CUTA CONFERENCE

The CUTA conference also included a session on low floor buses. It featured presentations on the Calgary experience with low floor buses, a maintenance perspective and the manufacturer's view of these progressive vehicles. Some points of interest:

- Calgary Transit averages 175 wheelchair boardings per month on their low floor routes. A user survey showed that 95 per cent of respondents were generally pleased

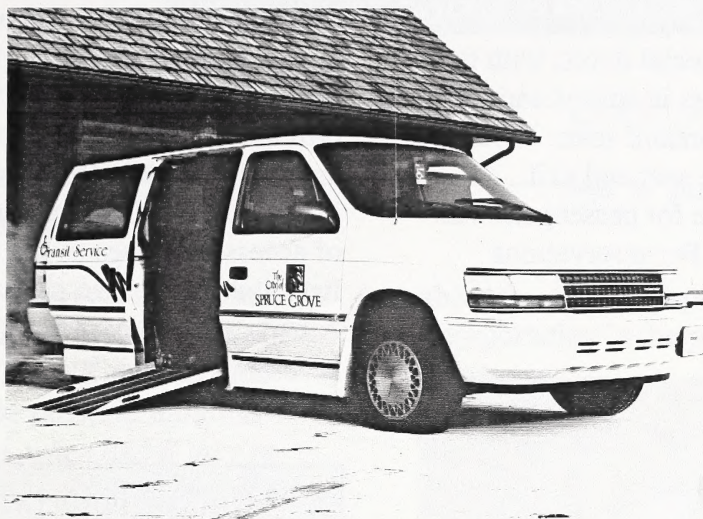
with the buses.

- Some respondents identified concerns about reduced seating, rough shifting of gears and lack of stanchions in the courtesy area.
- As for maintenance, low floor buses tend to be less expensive to maintain in their first year than standard buses. They also get slightly better fuel economy, although they give up considerable ground to standard buses when it comes to tire and brake wear.
- Manufacturers are continuing to improve the design of low floor buses and are retrofitting older versions of these vehicles to incorporate the improvements.
- Lack of standardization on specifications for low floor buses is a problem for manufacturers. Because different jurisdictions insist on their own specifications, production costs increase.
- All agreed that the additional costs of purchasing low floor buses are a significant factor in this time of reduced funding.

SPRUCE GROVE SPECIALIZED TRANSIT

For many years specialized transit in Spruce Grove consisted of a seniors' van. This 10 passenger unit had no wheelchair accessibility and had reached

the end of its life expectancy. Specialized Transit Service, the non-profit organization responsible for the program, began planning in anticipation of the need to improve service. As a result, by October 1994 they were operating with two new vehicles.



Specialized Transit Service's wheelchair accessible minivan (Spruce Grove).

One is a new 13-passenger van to be used for seniors outings. The second vehicle is a converted minivan with wheelchair accessibility. With a low floor and space for three wheelchairs, the minivan has an access ramp instead of a hydraulic lift because of weight problems posed by the latter system.

Specialized Transit Service decided on vans of different sizes instead of one large vehicle for reasons of fuel economy. After looking at the transit systems of central Alberta towns they concluded they could keep operating expenses down by using a minivan for trips involving just two or three people.

Both vehicles run on a "personal service" which allows users to book them in advance, as opposed to running on a pre-set schedule. Bonnie Foster, office manager for Specialized Transit

Service, says that 90 per cent of the trips made by the minivan are for medical visits into Edmonton. Because of the nature of their travel requirements, users find the personal service much more flexible and comfortable than a scheduled one. While some appointments are booked as much as two months in advance,

Specialized Transit

is still able to offer same-day service in most instances.

INTER-CITY BUSES

Good news for travellers on "the Alberta corridor". Greyhound is now offering wheelchair accessible service on the Calgary - Red Deer - Edmonton route. Red Arrow's accessible service will be in operation in early March. All four of Red Arrow's coaches serving the corridor will be equipped with hydraulic lifts and special access doors for loading wheelchairs. However, Red Arrow will need advance notice to make space for tying down a wheelchair by removing a seat. They prefer reservations 24 hours in advance.

Greyhound requires notice of at least 24 hours if accessible service is required so they can ensure one of their converted buses is available. They also use hydraulic lifts and special doors, with tie-downs for wheelchairs in spaces vacated by the removal of standard seats. Both coach lines also have seat and exit instructions in Braille for passengers with visual impairments. For reservations call:

Greyhound

Edmonton 421-4211

Calgary 265-9111

rest of Alberta 1-800-661-8747

Red Arrow

Edmonton 424-3339

Calgary 531-0350

Red Deer 343-2356

rest of Alberta 1-800-232-1958

MEET CATHERINE TAYLOR

Catherine Taylor is the new co-ordinator for the Advisory Committee on Barrier Free Transportation. This is one of her responsibilities as a policy analyst with Alberta Transportation and Utilities. She came to the department in November 1994 from the Alberta Human Rights Commission, where she worked as a consultant. Prior to that she practised law with a downtown Edmonton firm.

Catherine sees accessible transit as essential for the integration of people with disabilities into mainstream society. She says, "If people are going to have the

freedom to integrate, transportation is key. Whether or not a building is accessible is irrelevant if you can't get there." Catherine is encouraged by the progress she sees towards a family of accessible transit services in our province. Two examples she points to are the increase in low floor buses in Edmonton and Calgary and the addition of accessible buses by the commercial lines linking the two cities. "I think Alberta's ahead of most of Canada with accessible transit."

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Editorial Board: June MacGregor, Assistant Deputy Minister, Planning and Development; Catherine Taylor, Co-ordinator, Barrier Free Transportation; Roberta Killips, Manager, Municipal Services; Wayne Brown, Executive Director, Urban Transportation; Bob Sargent, Manager, Carrier Compliance; Brian Marcotte, Executive Director, Policy Development; Bill Kenny, Engineer Roadway Geometric Standards; Alec Cherwenuk, Director, Traffic Operations; Jayne Jeneroux, Director, Communications; Derek Drager, Editor, Communications.

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